



Miracle on Southwest Boulevard

Chapter Eight: *TargetTeach[®] and Benchmark Testing*

Many schools in the Tulsa district had extremely low test scores. After our horrible test scores were reported at the end of my first year as principal at Eugene Field Elementary, Tulsa Public Schools got in touch with a company named Evans Newton Incorporated (ENI). ENI has a process called TargetTeach[®] that helps low-performing schools raise their test scores. We were strongly encouraged to use our school improvement money from the state of Oklahoma to hire ENI to align our textbooks and our teaching objectives to the Oklahoma State curriculum standards. I was shocked to learn there are sixty-four reading objectives in the third grade, but the state of Oklahoma only tests twenty-six of them. 26 out of 64. Mind boggling. I didn't know that, and neither did the teachers.

We developed a process we called "Power Objectives," and we placed the objectives for each grade in two categories. We had the "need to know" objectives, those that were tested, and the "nice to know objectives," those that were not tested. We taught the "need to know" objectives to mastery using at least four different lessons. We took the time to make sure each and every student mastered those "need to know" objectives. If we had time, we taught the "nice to know" objectives. Did we teach to the test? Absolutely! If the state of Oklahoma thought it was important enough to test it, we taught it!

Employees of ENI descended on our school in early January of 2005, and we started taking direction from them.

They took our textbooks and aligned them to the state testing standards. Most of our textbooks only aligned with the state test by 50 percent. In other words, only half of the lessons in the textbooks covered learning objectives on the Oklahoma achievement test. Our main math text, which we had just purchased, only aligned by 10 percent. Ten! We were sick about it. Soon, we discovered that most objectives were not even presented in our books. It was baffling to our entire staff that our teaching materials were not more closely connected to the skills our students were supposed to learn. When text book companies are creating textbooks that don't align with the state testing standards, something needs to change. Their content needs to be regulated.

I learned the hard way that textbook salesmen will lie to educators and claim that the textbook they are selling aligns 100 percent with the state standards. We often found their claims to be untrue. Some textbook companies do a better job aligning their texts than others, but 99 percent

of all textbooks are written with California and Texas state tests in mind. California and Texas have the biggest student populations. Oklahoma students, as well as students in most other states, just get what is geared to those who live and test in California and Texas.

Working around the clock, employees of TargetTeach® developed benchmark tests. We were to make sure we were teaching the “need to know” objectives through several waves of benchmark testing throughout the year.

TargetTeach® staff also helped to develop lesson plans with the missing content objectives. They gave us extra lessons so we had ready-made successful lessons in hand when school started. They gave us packets for the on-level learner as well as packets for the lower-level learner. Their assistance, support, and materials were excellent.

Homework packets for the students were assembled in both English and Spanish for our Spanish speaking families. TargetTeach® and ENI were helping lay a foundation for eventual academic success.

We incorporated many educational initiatives to help the students at Eugene Field, but academically we used TargetTeach®. The practices that TargetTeach® embedded in our school became our academic backbone. After my first semester working with TargetTeach®, I am proud to say Eugene Field made adequate yearly progress for the first time in years. We began with a score of 288 out of 1500, and in one semester almost doubled our achievement scoring, 465 out of 1500. The heights to which we would eventually soar, I would soon find out.

Our teachers and students continued working hard with the lessons TargetTeach® had given us. We were teaching the objectives, and our students were learning. Benchmark testing was going smoothly, every couple of weeks, and we were on our way to earning better test scores.

One day in early March 2005 I was giving a tour of my school to a principal from a neighboring school district. As I was walking with her around the building, I was explaining to her the value of teaching the “need to know” objectives to mastery.

She stopped and looked at me and said, “You can’t do that. That is cheating. You are teaching to the test!”

I started laughing and exclaimed, “Heck yes, we are teaching to the test. Why not? Let’s set our students up for success!”

“Is it allowed?” asked the other principal.

“Absolutely,” I said, “Here is the number and contact information for ENI’s TargetTeach®.”

Active learning was still occurring in our classrooms; we were simply adjusting our teaching concepts to include objectives from the state test. Yes, teachers should teach with mindfulness about the questions their students will be answering on state achievement tests. Questions are based on concepts that educators on state-wide committees have agreed are essential for the students to know and understand. The questions are not drawn from random or irrelevant facts and skills. To put it bluntly, "It's stupid not to teach to the test." And I didn't realize that until TargetTeach[®] came into our school. With TargetTeach[®], our teachers weren't copying notes out of a book. We were using effective and interesting lessons and active learning was going on in every Eugene Field classroom.

In my opinion, every district could benefit by working with ENI to help align their textbooks and to also figure out what textbook best lines up with its state standards. I am and will continue to be a strong and enthusiastic advocate for ENI's TargetTeach program[®]. Academically, it works. If it can work at Eugene Field with our students, it can work anywhere.

**Note: This excerpt from, "Miracle on Southwest Boulevard" was Posted with expressed permission of the author, Cindi Hemm.*
